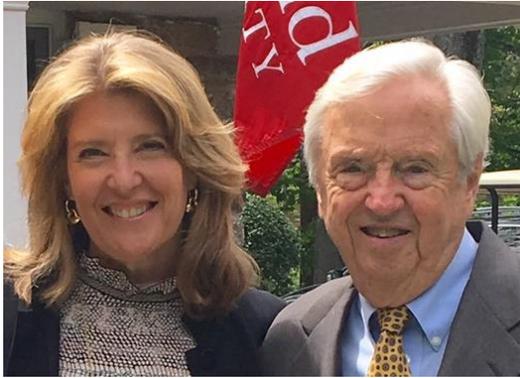


Op Ed by Cindi Bigelow
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During my first week on the job in our family business, my father taught me a lesson I never learned at Northwestern's [Kellogg School of Management](#).

I had just received my MBA and was proud of that accomplishment. I immediately started work as the family company's cost accountant and was ready to set the world — and Bigelow Tea — on fire with my bold ideas and innovative concepts.

On our first PC, I was putting together the company's first bills of material, and I couldn't wait to show the CEO — my father, David — what I had accomplished.

On my third day, he came down to see me.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"It's going great," I said, and was about to explain the project when I noticed he was preoccupied with my "out-basket."

"You have envelopes going out," he said.

"Yes, they are my bills that need to be mailed."

"But they don't have any stamps on them."

"I know," I said.

He paused, reflected a moment and replied, "Gee, Cindi, if you don't put stamps on your envelopes, then why should the other employees put them on theirs? So why don't you go buy some stamps and put them on your mail."

It was the first of many lessons I got from [David Bigelow](#) about business practices ... and humility. And it was also a lesson in leadership, the kind of leadership that my father exemplified.

Over the years, there were hundreds of similar occasions that emphasized one of his foremost principles: *The boss sets the tone, he/she sets the standard. The boss determines how high or how low the bar is for acceptable performance based on his/her personal actions.*

You see, he was very democratic in the way he ran his business, and the employees revered him because he had a common touch. I should add that he displayed the same values and integrity as a father.

I'm not engaging in hyperbole when I say my father was a saint. Anyone who knows him always says he's one of the finest men there is, although he would certainly disagree. To my biased thinking, he's one of most giving, loving, intelligent and humble men I've met — in addition to being a great father. That's quite an accolade from a daughter because it is even harder to be a successful parent than it is being a successful businessperson (and that is incredibly hard!).

The most important thing any father can do is give his children the assurance that whenever they turn around, he'll be there — providing, protecting, advising, loving ... all the things fathers are meant to do. And that is exactly what my father did for my sister and me. All the years he was running the company, he never missed having dinner with us, and whenever I needed him, he was always there. He never put his business before his family, and I've tried to be as conscientious in raising my own children.

Every Sunday after dinner, I'd ask, "Dad, can we get ice cream?" And the answer was always "yes." Then, he'd take my sister and me to the local Carvel in Westport and buy us soft-serve cones.

He always offered support, and if he had to teach us a lesson, he did it by example and not criticism. Whenever I came home with a report card, he'd look at it and exclaim, "Cindi, oh my gosh! All A's! I was lucky if I got C's when I was your age."

That praise made me one of the proudest girls in school. Years later, when I visited his alma mater, [Avon Old Farms School](#), to watch as he received a lifetime achievement award, I discovered that he was far from "average." He had received all the top awards from students and faculty, and then went on to Yale. However, he never bragged about the honors or used them as an opportunity to one-up someone else.

I would often sit in executive committee meetings and see him handle volatile issues with a higher level thought process and insight. Most importantly, what impressed me then and continues to impress me was his sense of fairness, not only as a father but also as a businessman. If there was ever anything that even hinted of unfairness, a whole new David Bigelow would show up at the door. This, even more than things like profit margins and marketing, motivated him. He'd get feisty if he thought someone was being wronged, either customers or employees. Many times, I'd hear him discuss company decisions and one of his first questions would be, "Is that fair for the employees?"

He raised me to have same sense of fairness as my moral compass in all aspects of my life. Another lesson he taught me was that leaders should do the right thing even when no one else is supporting them. Sometimes that means staying firm when you know what you're doing is right and have the confidence that it will play out properly in the long haul. When he wanted to build a new plant but still stay in Connecticut, everyone said he was wrong for many reasons ... wages, taxes, utilities. The list was endless. He went against all the members of his team because he knew if we wanted to maintain our outstanding manufacturing work force, we would have to rebuild and stay in state. Thirty years later, I look at our Connecticut plant and see the most engaged and passionate workforce. They are the definition of the perfect plant. And we owe that to him.

He also taught me to be successful without being successful at someone else's expense. For my father, the highest calling is to be a good, decent human being. He lives by that in business and with his family. He never compromises.

Over the years, he continues to be an inspiration as chairman of the board, a father and a husband. Everyone should be as fortunate as I am, because one of life's greatest blessings is to have a father committed to doing right in a world that often confuses right and wrong. His philosophy is very simple: be honest, be fair, be concerned about others more than yourself and remember that success has many different definitions. His always valued being able to look back at his accomplishments and know he thought of the greater good.

Thank you, Dad, for your many invaluable lessons and more importantly, the power of your example.
